

## **Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, Hunting Dogs and Game Birds**

The ongoing outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5 in the United States is now the largest such outbreak in the country's history. HPAI has been confirmed in wild, captive, commercial and backyard birds in 21 states since December 2014. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS) has confirmed 223 detections of HPAI H5 in backyard and commercial poultry in 15 states, with over 48 million birds affected as of early July 2015. No new outbreaks have been reported in poultry since mid June. However, agriculture and industry representatives anticipate a possible resurgence in fall 2015. There continue to be no human infections recognized in association with this outbreak.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources has been working closely with the Department of Agriculture to implement strategies aimed at reducing the impacts of HPAI on Maryland's poultry industry. The Maryland DNR's Wildlife and Heritage Service with USDA APHIS is conducting surveillance to detect avian influenza viruses in wild waterfowl to identify the distribution of avian influenzas in the State and detect the spread of influenzas to new areas of concern.

As part of DNR's HPAI response, we offer hunters, retriever training permittees, and retriever clubs the following information concerning the risk of avian influenza virus to hunting dogs.

### **Are Hunting Dogs at Risk to Bird Flu?**

The highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), referred in the media as bird flu, is not easily transmitted to animals other than birds. It has resulted in massive mortality in commercial turkeys and laying chickens in the western and mid-western U.S. A small number of wild migratory birds (mostly ducks) have been found carrying the HPAI virus. In surveillance conducted in 2006 -2011, wild ducks in Maryland were found to have a very low incidence of the low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI). A normal-looking, normal-acting duck is not likely to carry the HPAI virus.

In a study in Thailand, researchers tested more than 600 stray dogs, many of which presumably had access to sick or dead poultry in areas where the bird flu is known to occur. Antibodies for the bird flu were found in about 25 percent of those dogs, meaning that they had been exposed to the disease but their immune system prevented them from becoming ill or dying.

Avian influenza is most commonly transmitted to dogs from eating or otherwise contacting carcasses of dead wild birds or catching infected live wild birds or poultry. It is possible the disease might also be transmitted dog to dog. Currently, cats have been the greatest cause of concern. Both cats and dogs can be infected, but they appear much less susceptible to the disease than poultry.

So far there is no evidence that dogs used for normal wild game bird hunting are considered at risk of acquiring avian influenza. There have been no documented cases of the HPAI virus infecting dogs of any kind in North America.

Nevertheless, dog owners should prevent their dogs from having contact with game birds that are obviously sick or found dead in the field. Hunters should not feed their dogs any raw meat from game birds. These are routine safety precautions that hunting dog owners should already be following. Owners of hunting dogs should stay well informed on this issue and should consult their veterinarian for more information about influenza in dogs and other pets. Canine influenza virus is different from the avian influenza viruses. For more information on avian influenza - visit the links below.

[www.mda.maryland.gov/animalhealth/pages/default.aspx](http://www.mda.maryland.gov/animalhealth/pages/default.aspx)

[www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=avian\\_influenza.html](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=avian_influenza.html)

### **Important News for Retriever Training Permittees and Retriever Clubs**

Those persons who are permitted to use captive-reared game birds for dog training should verify in writing that the source of their birds is from a U.S. National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) Avian Influenza clean premise. Game birds imported from another state should come from an NPIP AI clean premise, an AI State

Monitored premise, or a flock that has tested negative for AI from 30 birds per flock within 10 days of entry into Maryland. For additional information go to [www.mda.maryland.gov](http://www.mda.maryland.gov).

**Very important - Anyone handling game birds or equipment that came in contact with game birds should not visit any backyard poultry or commercial poultry site to avoid the potential of transferring HPAI virus to those premises.**

Persons handling captive-reared game birds while dog training or when working at field trials and hunt tests should take precautions and wear personal protective equipment (PPE) to minimize the human health risks and the potential for contracting avian influenza. To date, there have been no cases of HPAI infection in humans in the United States. The risk of human infection is considered by health experts to be very low. However, for personal health we recommend that anyone handling game birds should:

1. Wear nitrile or plastic gloves when handling birds.
2. Do not drink, eat, or smoke when handling birds.
3. After removing the gloves, wash hands thoroughly for at least 30 seconds (using soap/water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer) before eating, smoking, using cell phone, and touching the face, hair, or exposed skin.
4. When working or training, work upwind of crated live birds to decrease the risk of inhaling airborne particulates, such as dust, feathers, or dander
5. Be sure to launder field clothes each day after handling birds.
6. Persons should monitor their health for any signs of flu-like symptoms within a week of handling birds. Should a person begin to feel ill they should visit their health care provider.